



Elder and Pastor Leadership Transitions Statement

March 17, 2023

Over the past few years, the congregation and leadership circles of DRCC have experienced a “Perfect Storm” of challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic visited personal loss on many of our families and fragmented our fellowship. Societal injustices and political differences have polarized our communities alienating many. Pastoral needs increased and we were attempting to staff up to meet them. At the close of 2020, we had successfully concluded our ALL-IN generosity journey, and had been planning to construct a larger auditorium. However, the impact of COVID caused us to go back to the drawing board to create a renewed plan that centered around the theme of “HEAL” in order to encourage reconciliation, healing, and reunite our congregation around our common mission.

On top of the perfect storm of events thrust upon us, we also navigated a founding pastor transition. A founding pastor transition is never easy, let alone with all the other challenges we faced. The transition was more complex than we anticipated, and it added stress for Rajendra and key leadership, as many churches have experienced similar challenges. We made mistakes along the way and are still learning from all that we faced. Our leadership circles are continuing to recover from the high stress of the past few years. The intensity and unrelenting pace of events have been challenging to all of us.

The Elders have been working through a process to learn and grow from the past few years, and to make some changes that will shift some of the leadership load and elevate some gifts we need in this new season. This process recently included a shift in elder leadership. I’m pleased to announce that Brian Deyaert is assuming the position as Acting Lead Elder. Brian has been on the Elders for over six years and was a former Trustee Chair. In addition, Glenn Vonk will assume the new position as Acting Elder Secretary. I’m personally grateful for this change, after serving as the lead elder for a number of years, including a particularly intensive stretch, and I’m looking forward to the Elder Board benefiting from the gifts Brian and Glenn bring as they take over the point leadership for the next season. Please welcome Brian - I’d like to invite him to continue the update.



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Brian Deyaert:

On behalf of the Elders, I want to thank Michelle for eight years of faithful leadership (please join me in giving her a big thank you). Michelle's pastoral ministry has been transformative for many in our congregation, including our Young Adults ministry. We are grateful for her many contributions to our community, and we look forward to her ongoing participation on the Elder Board as well as on the teaching team.

As Michelle mentioned, the Elders have been working in a multi-month process to learn and adjust from the past few years and to continue to grow and to improve in light of much reflection and wise counsel. We are working with a church consultant, Greg Ligon, who brings extensive experience advising churches around the country. We have been committed to seeking the mind-of Christ through transparent and direct communication, prayer, and our determination to join together and grow through this difficult season.

The Elders and Rajendra have been praying and working together to address the challenges from the past few years. Rajendra and Erika have also been praying intensely, seeking God's direction. **But it is with very deep sadness and much affection that I share with you that Rajendra has determined that his season at DRCC has come to a close.** We have been blessed by Rajendra's leadership on staff for the past 19 years. Rajendra and Erika feel confident that this is the decision that will honor God and their family. While we grieve their decision, we are also thankful for Rajendra's leadership through this difficult stretch, and we honor him for faithfully calling us to a deeper walk in Christ. The leadership of DRCC will continue to support Rajendra and his family as they transition and continue to pray for discernment as to their next right step.

Rajendra plans to share more with us on Sunday, March 26th. While Rajendra was not able to be here to speak with you today on the heels of a pastor's retreat that he and Erika attended this week, he wanted us to share this message with you:

"Erika and I are grateful to have had the opportunity to serve DRCC for 19 years. I know the last few years have been difficult for all of us as we navigated complex issues and multiple conflicts. All of this took a toll on each of us as it did on me and our family. Over the last few months, Erika and I have felt an increasing sense that the chapter of our lives here at DRCC is coming to a close. Erika and I prayed and wanted to let you know I will be stepping down from the Senior Pastor position effective April 8th.



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We don't know what's next for us, so we ask for your prayers as we seek to discern God's will for our future. While we feel deep sadness that we are at this point, sadness isn't the only emotion we feel. We are grateful for the many kingdom stories we have been privileged to be a part of. Each of you impacted our lives and blessed us. I pray God's grace and wisdom on you as you lead DRCC to greater kingdom victories."

The elders and staff recognize that this news may come as a shock to many of you, as it did to us, subsequently coupled with a range of emotions and questions as we all process and adjust. But we have three requests:

- **First**, along with the elders, trustees, and staff, please pray for Rajendra, Erika, and the family as they prayerfully discern God's plan for their future.
- **Second**, join with us through this process - we wholly believe that God is working in and through each of us as ministers of Christ. We will continue to proclaim Christ through our theme of "HEAL," and we will continue to pray for God's healing "in" us and "through" all of us. We are blessed for the many strong ministries within this congregation. Together, with Christ at the center of this community, we have navigated the last three years with the many unprecedented events of this time, and we will continue to prayerfully move forward with ministry to serve and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have seen God's hand and blessing upon this community, and we are grateful for each one of you, and for the privilege to serve alongside you. We greatly value you; we are praying for you, and we encourage you to pray, and to continue to serve in ministry. Please also know that there will be ongoing opportunities to connect with leadership and process together. Please reach out to us. We are here for you.
- **Lastly**, please pray for the elders, trustees, and staff as we too process this loss. Please pray for us as we diligently collaborate with one another to move forward. We will build on our long history of shared leadership. Under the oversight of the Board of Elders, we are grateful to have multiple leadership structures in place, including:
 - **The Pastoral Leadership Council** comprised of our Executive Director Jason Earl and Staff Pastors and Elders Roger Record, Paul Foss, Michael Yudt, and Mike Bernoi,
 - **The Joint Leadership Planning Team** consisting of key leaders across our three leadership circles: the Staff, Elders and Trustees, and lastly
 - **The Preaching & Teaching Team** of Pastors and Elders including Roger Record, Paul Foss, Mike Bernoi, Michael Yudt, Michelle Rader, and Blake Dunlevy.



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Today, following the service, our elders, trustees, and staff will be available to pray with you and to begin to process with you. This statement will also be posted on the DRCC website (damascus.com/updates), along with answers to some Frequently Asked Questions, and of course, we will continue to provide updates moving forward.

After Rajendra shares next weekend, there will be opportunities to sign up to process with church leaders. We are also planning nights of prayer and worship where we can join together as we lean into God for comfort, courage and wisdom. We invite you to join us for the first of these events this Tuesday, March 21st.

Again, Rajendra is looking forward to sharing a message with you in person next week, and we look forward to coming together with him next Sunday. Additionally, we are planning a celebration for the Pillai family sometime after Easter to thank and honor them for their leadership and their many contributions to ministry in this community.

At this point, I would like to invite my good friends and co-elders to join us on stage to pray a blessing over Pastor Rajendra, his family, and our faith community.

As Rajendra has consistently cast to us a vision of prayer—we know that *“Every time we pray... something happens.”*